ON CARD-PLAYING.

IN A

LETTER

FROM

MONSIEUR DE PINT

TO

MONSIEUR DIDERO

WITH

A Tranſlation from the Ori

AND

Obſervations by the Tran

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Extrait d'une Lettre

DE

MONSIEUR DE PINTO,

A

MONSIEUR DIDEROT.

A La Haye, le 19 Mai, 17

CROYEZ vous que la Toleran s' etablira à la fin en Europe Que les moeurs deviendrons plus doux les hommes moins mechans et moin malheureux? Tantôt je m'en flatte, e puis j'en déſeſpére. Cependant à tou prendre, il me paroit que le Genre

ain, Je parle de la petite portion qui occupe notre Europe, s' eſt un peu amelioré : mais, ce qui peut-etre vous ſurprendra, c'eſt que parmi pluſieurs cauſes auxquelles mon imagination attribue cette revolution dans les moeurs, je regarde le goût univerſal du jeu des cartes, comme un des reſſorts les plus actifs ; qui a, pour ainſi dire refondu le Genre Humain en Europe. N'allez pas vous imaginer que je n'apperçois pas tout le mal que la fureur du jeu fait dans l'un & dans l'autre ſexe ; mais il en eſt reſulté des avantages qui pourroient le balancer, et l'emporter ſur le mal.

D'abord ; voici mon raiſonnement. Avant cette epoque, les deux ſexes etoient moins unis, je veux dire, qu'ils etoient moins enſemble, en ſocieté, en compagnie : les hommes l'etoient d'avantage : il y avoit des cotteries ; on alloit à la taverne ; il y avoit plus d' yvrognes, par conſequence, plus de liaiſons, plus d'amitié. L' Ennui, une des plus grandes cauſes du developement de la perfectibilité humaine, excitoit les hommes á cultiver leurs talens, á s'occuper, á étudier,

étudier, á travailler, a cabaler, á des conſpirations : la Politique etoit le ſujet des converſations que le loiſir, et l'ennui enfantoient : on controloit le gouvernement, on s'en plaignoit, on conſpiroit, et on trouvoit des amis a qui ſe fier : les grande vertus et les grands vices etoient plus ordinaires. D'un autre côté les regards des hommes ne ſe raſſaſſiant pas des appas des femmes, vis-à-vis un tapis verd, au moyen du taliſman des cartes, l'amitié et l'amour etoient des paſſions. A preſent, graces aux cartes, on n'eſt gueres que galant ; ou a beaucoup de connoiſſances, et pas un ami ; nombre de maitreſſes et pas une amante. Un Mahometan qui contempleroit avec des yeux Aſiatiques, nos grandes aſſembleés, auroit la malice de croire que les Bachas Européens ont leur ſerail en commun : vous trouverez donc que le jeu, qui mêle et confond les hommes et les femmes, dans la ſocieté, encore plus que les cartes, doit forcément ralentir l'energie de l'amour. Ajoutez y que les efforts pour fuir l'ennui ſe trouvent ralentis par cet amuſement. Du relachement de ces trois reſſorts, combinez en les effets, et calculez en les reſultats. La vie plus

ntaire á laquelle cet eternel amuſe-
ment reduit les deux ſexes, amollit le
corps, d'ou reſulte en Phyſique et en
Morale un ſyſteme nouveau de moeurs,
de temperament, et de conſtitution. La
Magie du jeu de cartes forme un foyer
commun de presque toutes les paſſions
en mignature ; elles y trouvent, pour
ainſi dire, toutes leur aliment. Il eſt
vrai quepreſque tout y eſt microſcopique,
et plus illuſoire encore que l'illuſion
commune ; l'ideé confuſe de bonheur et
de malheur s' y trouve ; la vanité même
y eſt intereſſée ; le jeu paroit etablir une
egalité illuſoire entre les joueurs ; c'eſt
le vehicule que raſſemble dans la ſocieté
les individus les plus diſcordans ; l'avarice
et l'ambition en ſont les mobiles ; le goût
univerſel du plaiſir ſe flatte de ſe ſatisfaire
par cet amuſement. Les Dames etant de
la partie, l'amour doit en être ; la ſphere
de nos paſſions ſe trouve retrecie, con-
centrée, et confinée à un petit orbite,
toutes les paſſions s'enchainent pour ainſi
dire elles memes, s'evaporent et s'epuiſent
loin de leur ſource et de leur but.
L' Ennui, le loiſir, la pareſſe, l'avarice,
l'ambition, et l'oiſiveté devorent en com-
mun, une nourriture creuſe qui enerve
leur

leur force et leur activité; et comm[illegible] la fermentation de ces grandes paſſions [illegible] reſulte d'ordinaire plus de mal que de bien, le genre humain a plus gagné que perdu. Il n'y a plus de grandes vertus; mais auſſi l'on ceſſe de voir des grands crimes; les aſſaſſinats, les empoiſonnemens, et toutes les horreurs des guerres civiles ſont incompatibles dans une nation où les hommes et les femmes perdent une ſi grande partie de leur tems au jeu de cartes.

On ſe plaint avec raiſon qu'on ne voit plus de ces genies createurs et devorants, non plus que de ces individus heroiques dont le partriotiſme et la vertu ennobliſſoient l'eſpece humaine: mais que ces preſens du ciel ont toujours été rares! au lieu que cette complication de forfaits et d'horreurs qui deshonorent la nature humaine, etoit ſi commune autrefois qu'elle n'etonnoit preſque plus. "*Un* "*mechant, un ennemi trouve cent fois par* "*jour l'occaſion de nuire* (dit Zoroaſtre) "*et un homme vertueux ne trouvera quel-*"*quefois pas dans une année l'occaſion de* "*faire du bien à ſon ami.*" La foule du genre humain ſe croit diſpenſée d'imiter

et

[illegible]e ſuivre les grands modeles, dont [illegible]le ſe ſent incapable ; mais elle n'a que trop de propenſion á ſe laiſſer entrainer au torrent des mauvais exemples. Vous ſentez, monſieur, (quelque eloignés que ces principes paroiſſent de ma theſe) combien ou peut les appliquer pour appuyer mon ſîſteme. L'yvreſſe d'un amuſement frivole qui trompe et qui elude l'effet des paſſions, affoiblit l'enthouſiaſme du coeur et de l'eſprit. Les vertus ſont ſouvent par là elaguées, mais les vices, et ſur tout les crimes, qui ſont en plus grand nombre, le ſont davantage. Ainſi je ne contredis nullement ce que j'ai appris de mes maitres ; je ſai encore par cœur une tirade de Monſieur Diderot ſur les paſſions : voici ſes propres paroles.

" On declame, ſans fin, contre les
" paſſions ; on leur impute toutes les
" peines de l' homme, et l'on oublie
" qu'elles ſont auſſi la ſource de tous ſes
" plaiſirs. Il n'y a que les paſſions, et
" les grandes paſſions qui puiſſent elever
" l'ame aux grandes choſes ; ſans elles,
" plus de ſublime, ſoit dans les moeurs,
" ſoit dans les ouvrages. Les beaux arts
" retournent

" retournent en enfance et la vertu
" devient minutieuſe. Les paſſions
" ſobres font les hommes communs ;
" l'amitié n'eſt que circumſpecte, ſi les
" perils d'un ami me laiſſent les yeux
" ouverts ſur les miens. Les paſſions
" amorties degradent les hommes ex-
" traordinaires ; la contrainte anéantit
" la grandeur et l'energie de la nature."

En admettant et en adoptant ces ſublimes idées je crois pouvoir avancer que les cartes ont cependant preparé l'eſprit et le cœur humain à recevoir les impreſſions que les progrés des connoiſſances et des lumieres devoient operer ſur le governement et les moeurs. Peut-être, avec le tems, on pourra ſe paſſer de cet echaffandage, et, pour lors, la vertu et la raiſon pourront prendre un plus grand eſſor. Ce paradoxe ne me paroit pas indigne de vos reflexions, je voudrois qu'on en fit un programme dans l'academie, ſcavoir " Si l'invention du jeu
" de cartes, le progrés de cet amuſement,
" et ſon univerſalité ont contribué a changer les moeurs en Europe." Une plume ſcavante et erudite pourroit diſſerter amplimont ſur les jeux des anciens,

leur

leur nature, leurs effets, et leurs differences eſſentielles des jéux qui occupent actuellement les ſocietés. Puis en arrivant à l'epoque de Charles VI. lors qu'on inventa le jeu de cartes, ſuivre ſes progrés, et obſerver les nuanees inſenſibles de moeurs qui ont ſuivi, pour ainſi dire, ces progrés. Dites moi, je vous prie, votre ſentiment là-deſſus, et ſoyez perſuadé que je ſuis votre admirateur ainſi que

Votre trés humble &

tres obeiſſant Serviteur,

I. P.

P. S.

P. S.

Comme mon programme raiſonné pourroit tomber un jour en des mains moins indulgentes, que les votres, permettez, monſieur que j' ajoute quelque eclairciſſement à ce nouveau ſiſteme, ce qui le rendra moins paradoxe. Je mets en fait qu'il a fallu la concurrence de pluſieurs cauſes pour polir l'Europe, et adoucir les moeurs au point actuel ; mais je preſume que parmi les cauſes ſaillantes, connues, et avouées, il peut ſe trouver une cauſe obſcure ; ſubalterne, et imperceptible, qui agiſſant plus univerſellement et ſans ceſſe, peut avoir ſervi tantôt d'éperon, et tantôt de frein aux autres. Cette cauſe pourroit bien etre le jeu de cartes. Je n'attribue pas moins pour cela le bien qu'ont fait à l'Europe les cauſes ſuivantes.

I. L'abolition du gouvernement feodal ; cela a ôtè du cahos les principes du gouvernement.

II. La decouverte de l'Amerique, en augmentant le commerce, l'or, l'argent et l'induſtrie ont prodigieuſement mul-

tiplié en Europe le nombre des aiſés et des riches, et a, par un effet des cauſes ſecondes, contribué à etablir une plus grande egalité parmi les hommes, ce qui n'a pas peu concouru à faire eclorre cette liberté qui s'eſt élevée de tous côtés ſur les débris du Deſpotiſme, et de la Barbarie : ce qui a compenſé tout le mal que cette decouverte a d'ailleurs cauſé au genre humain ; ſi quelque choſe peut compenſer la depopulation, et le poiſon qu'on a apporté du nouveau monde, juſques dans la ſource du plaiſir et de l'exiſtence. Les mœurs atroces ſe ſont humaniſeés : j'ai encore prouvé cette théſe ailleurs dans un ecrit que n'eſt pas imprimé.

III. L'Imprimerie, le progrés des arts et des ſcienees qui ont eclairé l'Europe ; en repandant les lumieres et les connoiſſances, les moeurs ne pouvoient que devenir plus douces.

IV. La triſte experience commence à détromper les princes, et les ſujets du Machiaveliſme ſpirituel, qui ne trouve plus tant de ſectateurs. On eſt trop eclairé pour ſe battre pour des ſillogiſmes

giſmes et pour des queſtions abſtraites. Il eſt à croire que lorſqu'on aura epuiſé toutes les erreurs politiques et morales, on s'apprôchera davantage d'un etat plus parfait. Les hommes reconnoitrout un jour qu'ils ſe donnent trop de peine pour étre mechans et malheureux, et qu'il eſt beaucoup plus facile d' être vertueux et heureux, autant que notre nature le comporte. Les Princes reviennent de plus en plus du Machiaveliſme. Je crois avoir demontré quelque part, que les interêts des princes, bien entendus, ne ſe croiſent pas, et je ſuis perſuadé qu'il en eſt de même des particuliers. Ces principes une fois bien developpés, et ſervant de baſe à l'education publique et univerſelle, pourroient un jour nous faire plaindre par une poſterité plus heureuſe, et *l'Ætas parentum* d'Horace ſeroit vrai en raiſon inverſe.

Extract of a Letter

FROM

MONSIEUR DE PINTO,

TO

MONSIEUR DIDEROT.

Hague May 19, 1767.

IS there any reaſon to think that a general toleration will at length be eſtabliſhed in Europe? That manners will become more ſocially gentle, and men leſs wicked, and leſs unhappy? Sometimes I flatter myſelf they will; ſometimes again I deſpair.

And yet, upon the whole, it appears to me that human-kind (I mean, that ſmall part of it which occupies our Europe) is rather altered for the better. But what may, at the firſt ſound of the propoſition ſurprize you, is that among many cauſes to which my reflexion leads me to attribute this revolution in manners,

ners, I look on the univerſal taſte for card-playing as one of the moſt active ſprings, that has, as one may ſay, recaſt and remodelled the human kind, in Europe. But, pray, do not miſtake me, or imagine that I do not perceive all the ill which the rage of play has done in both the one and the other ſex: but there have reſulted advantages from it which might ballance the miſchief, and even preponderate, on the totality. Thus I argue. Before the epoch of cards, there was leſs union between the ſexes; I mean, they were leſs together, leſs in ſociety or company; the men were more ſo: the meetings in clubs, taverns, were more in vogue; convivial drinking formed more connexions, more friendſhip; the heavineſs of time on hand, which is one of the moſt powerful cauſes of the unfolding of human perfectibility, excited men to cultivate their talents, to employ themſelves, to ſtudy, to labor at the arts, to cabal, to project conſpiracies: politics were the ſubject of the converſations which leiſure, and a kind of neceſſity for paſſing away the time, produced; they cenſured the government; they complained of it, con-

ſpired againſt it; and there were on ſuch occaſions, friends to be found, who might be truſted: the great virtues and the great vices were more common. Then again, the men in thoſe days, not having, by means of the taliſman of the cards, the opportunity of ſatiating their eyes, with the charms of women in full counter-view to them, over the green carpet, friendſhip and love, were paſſions: but, at preſent, thanks to thoſe ſame cards, there is little more left than gallantry: there may be found plenty of acquaintances, and not a ſingle friend; a number of miſtreſſes, and not one beloved. A Mahometan, that ſhould behold, with Aſiatic eyes, our great aſſemblies, would be unlucky enough to imagine that our European baſhaws kept their ſeraglio in common. You will then find that play, which confounds, packs, and ſhuffles together, men and women, in ſociety, more than even it does the cards, muſt neceſſarily relax and weaken the energy of love and friendſhip. Add, that the efforts of a more eſſential kind, to get rid of the burthen of tedious time, muſt be ſlackened by this trifling diverſion. From

the

the letting down theſe three great ſprings, love, friendſhip, buſineſs, combine the effects, and calculate the produce. The ſedentary life to which this eternal amuſement reduces the two ſexes, enervates the body; whence, both in the natural and moral ſtate of man, there reſults a new ſyſtem of manners, temper, and conſtitution. The magic of card-playing forms the common point of concourſe of almoſt all the paſſions in miniature. They all, as one may ſay, find in it their nouriſhment. Every thing indeed is microſcopical, and more illuſive than the common illuſion. A confuſed idea of good and bad luck preſents itſelf: vanity itſelf finds its account in it: play ſeems to eſtabliſh a falſe ſhow of equality among the players: it is the call that aſſembles, in ſociety, the moſt diſcordant, the moſt incongruous individuals; avarice and ambition are its movements; the univerſal taſte for pleaſure flatters itſelf with procuring its ſatisfaction by this amuſement; the ladies being of the party, that love of which gallantry takes the name in vain, muſt be of it too: the ſphere of our paſſions becomes contracted, concentered

and

and confined to a petty orbit; all the paſſions put themſelves, as one may ſay, into chains, or evaporate and exhauſt themſelves far from their ſpring-head, and wide of their mark. Time, heavy on hand, leiſure, lazineſs, avarice, ambition, and idleneſs, devour, together in common, a light unſubſtantial food, which enervates their force and activity: and as it is from the fermentation of the great paſſions that there commonly reſults more of evil than of good, humankind has gained more than it has loſt. There are no longer great virtues, but then we do not ſee ſo many great crimes as formerly: aſſaſſinations, poiſon, and all the horrors of a civil war, are incompatible with the ſtate of a nation, in which the men and women loſe ſo great a part of their time at cards.

It is a general complaint, and not without reaſon, that we no longer ſee any of thoſe great and powerful original geniuſes, nor yet any of thoſe heroic individuals whoſe patriotiſm, whoſe virtues, ennobled the human ſpecies. But then how rare have not theſe preſents from Heaven at all times been!

Whereas that complication of crimes and horrors which diſhonor human nature, was formerly ſo common, that they hardly created any ſurpriſe. "*A* "*wicked man, an enemy (ſays Zoroaſter)* "*ſhall, a hundred times a day, find oc-* "*caſion of doing miſchief; and a virtuous* "*perſon ſhall not ſometimes, find an op-* "*portunity, once in a whole year, to do* "*a good office to a friend.*" The mob of mankind think themſelves diſpenſed from imitating or following great models, of which they ſee themſelves incapable; but they have only too much propenſity to the ſuffering themſelves to be carried away with the torrent of bad examples.

As remote however, as, on the firſt ſuperficial view, theſe principles appear from my Theſis, you can hardly, Sir, not feel how applicable they are to the ſupport of my ſyſtem. The infatuation of a frivolous amuſement, which deceives and eludes the effect of the paſſions, weakens the enthuſiaſm of the head and heart; by which means the virtues are often lopped of their growth; but then the vices, and eſpecially the crimes which are in greater number, are ſtill

more ſo. So that I do not in the leaſt contradict what I learnt from thoſe I am proud to call my maſters in thinking. I have ſtill by heart a fine ſtroke of Monſieur Diderot on the paſſions. Theſe are his own words.

" Men are for ever declaiming againſt " the paſſions; they impute to them all " the pains incident to mankind; not " remembering that they are alſo the " ſource of all its pleaſures. There is " nothing but the paſſions, and the very " great paſſions too, that can elevate " the ſoul to great things: without " them there is no ſublime, either in " manners, or in works. The polite " arts relapſe into infancy, and virtue " herſelf becomes trifling. The cool " ſober paſſions form only common men. " Friendſhip does not riſe beyond cir- " cumſpection, if the dangers of a friend " leave my eyes open to my own. The " paſſions damped or deadened degrade " extraordinary men; and conſtraint " deſtroys the greatneſs and energy of " nature."

Now, while I admit and adopt theſe ſublime ideas, I think I may venture, at the ſame time to aſſert that card-playing has nevertheleſs prepared the human head and heart for receiving the impreſſions which the progreſs of knowledge, and of the new lights thrown upon things might operate on the government, and on manners. Not impoſſibly, in proceſs of time, we may come to do without this ſcaffolding; and then virtue and reaſon may take a nobler flight. This paradox may not, perhaps, be unworthy of your reflexions. I could almoſt wiſh there was a programma made of it, in your academy; viz. "*Whether or no the invention of card-*
"*playing, the progreſs of this amuſement,*
"*and its univerſality, have contributed to*
"*change the manners in Europe?*"

There would be ample matter for a learned profound pen to deſcant on the games or diverſions of the antients, their nature, their effects, and their eſſential differences from the kinds of play, which prevail in the preſent ſtate of ſociety: Then on coming to the epoch of Charles the Sixth, when card-playing

playing paſſes for having been invented, to follow its progreſs, and to obſerve the inſenſible degrees of alteration in the manners, which have, as one may ſay, attended that progreſs.

May I beg you, Sir, to let me know your opinion on this, and to remain perſuaded that I am conſtantly your admirer as well as

Your moſt humble, and

moſt obedient ſervant,

I. P.

POSTSCRIPT.

As this kind of commented programma of mine may fall into hands leſs candidly indulgent than yours, permit me, Sir, to add ſome explanation to this new ſyſtem, that will leſſen its air of paradox.

I lay it down for a poſtulate, that it required the concurrence of many cauſes to poliſh Europe, and to bring its manners to that degree of civiliſation, at which we ſee them at preſent; in compariſon with their former ferocity; but

I preſume that among the ſtriking cauſes, known and acknowledged, there may be found a cauſe ſubaltern, obſcure, and imperceptible, which acting more univerſally, and inceſſantly withal, may have ſerved ſometimes as a ſpur, ſometimes as a curb to the others: nor is it impoſſible that this cauſe may be card-playing. At the ſame time, I do not the leſs for that, give due credit to the following cauſes for the benefit which Europe has received by them.

FIRST; the abolition of the feudal ſyſtem, which drew the principles of government out of a chaos.

SECONDLY; The diſcovery of America, by which, commerce being augmented, gold, ſilver, and induſtry have prodigiouſly multiplied, in Europe, the number of great and of eaſy fortunes. This, by an effect of ſecond cauſes, has contributed to eſtabliſh a greater equality among men; nor has it concurred a little to bring into exiſtence that civil liberty which has, on all ſides, raiſed itſelf on the ruins of deſpotiſm and barbarouſneſs; and this may be allowed

allowed to be a compenſation for all the ill which in other reſpects this diſcovery has cauſed to human-kind, if any compenſation there can be for the depopulation of Europe, and for the contagion, brought from that new-world, which poiſons even the ſources of pleaſure and of exiſtence. The atrociouſneſs of manners has been humaniſed. This I have proved elſewhere, in a theſis not yet printed.

THIRDLY; The art of printing, the progreſs of arts and ſciences having enlightened Europe, by diffuſing knowledge, and reaſon, it was not in nature, that the manners of its inhabitants ſhould not become more gentle, more civilized.

FOURTHLY; A melancholic dreadful experience has, at length, begun to convince, both ſovereigns and ſubjects of the abuſe of the excellence of religion to very different purpoſes: the ſpiritual Mechiaveliſm no longer finds ſo many ſectaries: people have opened their eyes too much to go to cutting one another's throats for ſyllogiſms and abſtruſe queſtions. It

It may be hoped that when all the errors political and moral ſhall have been exhauſted, men may make nearer approaches to a ſtate of greater perfection: they will, one of theſe days, diſcover and acknowledge, that they give themſelves too much trouble, and take too much pains, to no better purpoſe than to be wicked and miſerable; and that it would be more eaſy for them to be virtuous and happy, or at leaſt as much ſo as our nature will comport. Even political Machiaveliſm begins to ſink in its credit with princes. I flatter myſelf that I have ſomewhere in my writings, demonſtrated that the intereſts of ſtates, well-underſtood, do not thwart each other, and I am perſuaded that it is the ſame with private individuals: Theſe principles being once clearly unfolded and made out, and ſerving for a baſis to the public and univerſal education, might, one day, render us objects of pity to our more happy poſterity, and with truth favorably invert Horace's *Ætas parentum pejor avis*, &c.

OBSERVATIONS.

OBSERVATIONS

BY THE

TRANSLATOR.

FROM the foregoing diſquiſition, ſo recommendable for the many new and juſt ideas in it, there ſeems to ariſe a queſtion, whether that comparative alteration from bad to leſs bad, which the ingenious writer allows to the preſent times, is, at bottom, ſo clear an advantage; or ſo good a bargain to human kind as the ſurface of things preſents it: a queſtion this which deſerves ſome attention, if it be true that while men are daily ſuffering and often periſhing, through the illuſion of perfidious appearances in ſo many points, moral, phyſical, and political, it cannot well be deemed expedient for their welfare or ſafety to add, without ſome modification, a propoſition that might tempt them to ſtand too much at their eaſe on falſe ground.

Not

Not denying that the general prevalence of card-playing may have inſenſibly but powerfully concurred with other cauſes, to that apparent favorable change, ſtill, its mode of operation, by weakening at once the vices and the virtues, affords no better idea of ſuch an amendment than of a rake, who, after his having been, by the fire of youth and exceſs of conſtitutional vigor, betraid into the intemperances of debauchery, ſhould grow reformed at the expence of his manhood; reformed not by the ſtrength of his mental powers, but by the weakneſs of his bodily ones. But ſurely a man thus lamentably tamed by impotency would no more repreſent a man eſſentially made better, than one qualified for an opera-ſinger, in his half-petticoats, plumes, and paſte-diamonds, reſembles a real man or a real heroe. An age rendered leſs rough by any thing ſo conſummately futile, ſo effeminate as card-playing, would be ſoft, but emaſculate.

Nor will any one think the mark is over-ſhot by treating cards with this contempt, who will but conſider that any taſte for them is inconteſtably and eternally,

eternally, at beſt, the ſtamp of mediocrity; ſince the annals of human-kind may be defied to produce a ſingle inſtance of a man of true genius, or real greatneſs of character, who did not heartily deſpiſe this frivolous way of murdering time, under the falſe pretence of relaxation: I call it a falſe pretence, becauſe the true motive, is an utter incapacity of taſte for objects worthy of filling the leiſure of a rational creature.

The moſt elevated underſtandings are very wiſely allowed, nay, required to unbend at times, nor are even denied a recourſe to trifles; but not to ſuch a paltry childiſh diverſion as has not even joy or mirth for its excuſe, being ſolely conſecrated either to fill up the dreary void of idleneſs with ſomething more worthleſs than idleneſs itſelf: or to give ſordid avarice the chance of ſatisfying itſelf, and oſteneſt to both theſe noble purpoſes, at once: a diverſion, in ſhort, only fit for ſharpers, for trifling old women, or for men reſembling trifling old women.

Any

Any ſeeming advantage then from ſuch a deſpicable ſource can hardly be leſs illuſive than the cards theirſelves; while the evils which they produce, were it only by the loſs of time they occaſion, are real and permanent. That light, unſubſtantial aliment on which the paſſions trifle away, at a card-table, their natural appetite to more ſolid fare, rather weakens than ſtrengthens the powers of the mind, not only to the excluſion of the great virtues, on which alone the happineſs of ſociety can ſolidly reſt; but this weakneſs diſpoſes the ſlaves of ſuch an habit, not indeed to great vices, but to the little, dirty ſelfiſh ones, ſuch as avarice, meanneſs of ſpirit, corruption, indolence, worthleſsneſs, which, by the contagion of example, gradually pervading a whole people, becomes a national character, and prepares deſtruction more ſlowly perhaps, but doubtleſs more ſurely than great crimes and great vices, which are leſs dangerous from their glare being more alarming.

While a turn for trifling is nothing more than the vice of a few deſpicable individuals,

individuals, it only creates, together with ſome apprehenſion for the infection's ſpreading, a pity for the degradation to which human kind is but too liable: but when trifling becomes an epidemical diſeaſe, it ceaſes to be trifling, and under a more ſerious form, commences public perdition. A circumſtance this, which is unfortunately attended with two deſperate ſymptoms, blindneſs and inſenſibility. A nation thus degenerated neither ſees nor feels her danger till periſhing in it. Worthleſsneſs of character is then no longer a diſadvantageous diſtinction of private individuals; when it ſhall have become the public complexion; as the partial ſhades of the day are abſorbed by the total one of the night, and one underſtanding, is, you know, as good as another in the dark. All lights will be then extinguiſhed, or worſe yet, nothing but the baneful glare of falſe ones will prevail. Falſe eloquence, falſe intereſt, falſe honor, and eſpecially falſe patriotiſm have an eaſy taſk of impoſing on a people too indolent to examine, too frivolous to be capable of examining the truth of things, and of thoſe things leaſt that concern them the moſt.

It may ſound indeed towards what is generally and very juſtly deſpiſed, a paradox, however rigidly true, that it is to a turn for frivolouſneſs originally brought on by crimes and vices, but kept up by ſuch amuſements, as by taking up too much time, and allowing too little thought, divert the mind from great and eſſential objects, that mighty empires and ſtates have owed their deſtruction, their inſlavement, and the continuation of their ſlavery.

Nothing probably contributed more to the final extirpation of the great virtues of republican Rome than the Circenſian games, the amphitheatrical ſhows, and public ſports, with which the ambitious rich amuſed and diverted that commonalty, in which the ſtrength of the ſtate capitally reſided, from an attention to the progreſs of their conſpiracy againſt its liberty, and legal ſhare of power. Theſe games, theſe ſhows, theſe ſports were the *cards* of Rome; not quite indeed ſo futile. With theſe wretched lull-a-bies began that kind of lethargic inſenſibility, which ended in what the courtiers of Auguſtus had

had the impudence to call better times, only becauſe they had ſucceeded to the horrors of the civil wars, and of the tables of proſcription; horrors which, humanly ſpeaking, would never have come into exiſtence, if thoſe ſtern and manly virtues, which were the genuine guardians of the Roman liberty, had not been firſt enfeebled by the great vices and crimes, which, contradictory as it may ſound, were nevertheleſs brought in by a miſuſe of the advantages obtained by the public virtue; a virtuous mother of an abandoned parricide daughter, luxury. This in her turn, begot that infernal brood of vices and crimes, which broke and diſpoſed the public mind for that turn for trifling which prepared its votaries for ſlavery; nothing being more apt to benumb, and lock up all the powers of counſel or action, ſo as to diſqualify them for any great, valuable, or manly purpoſes. If it does not immediately take away the animal valor of the individuals of a country, it is ſure, in the long run to ſoften and daſtardiſe them; and in the mean while it effectually deſtroys their political courage of ſpirit and of thought. Thus the Romans,

enervated by luxurious trifling, fell an infamous prey to the treaſonable activity of black ambition. Then it was that the great virtues ceaſed, and for a while the great vices and crimes, not through the vigor of juſtice, but from the policy of tiranny, courting favor by the diſcountenance of them, and finding its account better in the ſubſtitution to them of trifling diverſions. Thus tiranny, for its own ends, became a momentary public benefit, but virtue the health of the conſtitution had periſhed for ever. Not ſo the vices. They lay only dormant through a tranſitory diſgrace, combined with the effect of that villainous opiate of frivolous amuſements; ſo that when they burſt out a freſh, they found nothing but a clear ſtage, and all favor to them: the great virtues which could alone effectually oppoſe them, being dead and buried, they had nothing to encounter but minds ſoftened, and prepared for them by the futility of the reigning diverſions. The vitious circle had taken place. Great crimes and vices had begotten frivolouſneſs, and frivolouſneſs, in return, had left the field open for them to reſume their ſway: ſurely nothing

thing can be leſs clear than the advantages ſuppoſed to reſult from trifling.

Is it not perhaps to a frivolous turn that a neighbouring nation, certainly not deficient in bravery, and eſtimable in many reſpects, owes its impotency of ſhaking off that depotiſm, which is ſo ſhameful, that it is equally denied by the deſpot who is manifeſtly and flagrantly exerciſing it, and by the ſubjects who are actually and meanly groaning under it? Leſs frivolous, could ſuch a people remain ſo long enſlaved?

But not to be partial, is it not to the exceſs of our own frivolouſneſs that we owe our nation's being beggared and needleſsly over-whelmed with debt? Leſs ingroſſed by futile amuſements, could the people not have ſeen, or ſeeing, not have effectually oppoſed the ſacrifice of this country to corrupting power and to miſguiding impoſture?

But even conſidered in the totality, has mankind much to boaſt, at bottom, of any mighty advantage from this ſuperficially plauſible amendment of ſociety?

ſociety? I do not aſk whether the pious murders of innocent perſons merely for their diſſent in matters of religion are leſs frequent than formerly, or whether the Inquiſition has put out for ever thoſe its horrid fires, whence the ſavory ſteam of the roaſt-meat of human victims is ſo conſiſtently ſuppoſed to aſcend grateful to the noſtrils of a Deity all of goodneſs and mercy; but I aſk whether the human blood has lately flowed in leſſer ſtreams? Half a million of lives recently ſacrificed in Germany, to the moſt falſe and futile of all motives, all paradox a-part, ſeem unhappily to prove that men, may be at once frivolous and ſanguinary, ridiculous and deplorable.

FINIS.

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